

Episode 6: Becoming a Peer Specialist- Navigating Training, Credentialing, and CEUs with Justin Beatty

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Justin Bell: Hey, everybody. Welcome to the Peer Support Professional's Guide. I'm your host, Justin Bell, research scientist in person. Recovery peer support is one of the fastest growing roles in behavioral health right now. With that growth comes opportunity, but also a lot of questions about how we do it. Well, so each episode of the guide, I sit down with peer specialists, leaders, advocates from across the field, talk about what's actually happening on the ground, what's working, what's challenging, what it takes to grow in this role. Whether you're just getting started as a peer, whether you've been doing this work for years, this is your guide to help you build skills and think critically. So you want to become a peer specialist, but where do you even start? The path into peer support can feel really complicated. Depending on where you live, you might hear a lot of different terms like certification, credentialing, state endorsements, continuing education, reciprocity, on and on and on. And it's not always clear what those terms actually mean or how they affect your career and professional development. So today I'm joined by someone who actually spends every day helping people navigate that complicated process. My guest is Justin Beatty. He's the Vice President of Accreditation and Certification at Mental Health America of Indiana and Executive Director of icata, as well as a founding member of ICNRC which both deal with things like credentialing and certification. the ICNRC being the International Certification and Reciprocity Consortium. So his work focuses on helping to build a qualified peer workforce while also thinking about those bigger picture issues that we've been talking about on this podcast, like where does the workforce go and how does it develop in the proper way? So whether you're considering becoming a peer specialist yourself, you're someone

who's just trying to hit your CEUs. You're supervising peers or leading them. I think you'll get a lot out of this conversation. So let's jump in. Thank you so much, Justin, for joining, the Peer Professional Support Guide. I think this is going to be the most practical episode of this season, which is really just going to be focused on how do you become a peer specialist and also, I guess, how do you stay a peer specialist in terms of continuing education credits, maybe some professional development stuff. but I've heard people talk about this wild west of credentialing, certification, cus, all this stuff. So hopefully you can help us figure some of this stuff out. I did want to note for our discussion today, we are going to. We have agreed to group all of the peer professional role titles into the one term peer specialist. So even though you know, you who are listening might have something different in your own state, we're going to use that term for this discussion today. So how are you doing today?

Justin Beatty: I'm doing good. I mean, thank you. Thank you for inviting me to do this. I get to work with you in so many other realms. It's going to be fun to just kind of sit here and chop it up about stuff we've talked about for a while. And that is just confusion for even people like us, that are, have these conversations every day.

Justin Bell: Yeah, I tell people that because I get emails and LinkedIn messages from people that are like, can you, you know, tell me about how to do like certification in my state? And I'm like, I study this and I don't really know all of these details, so maybe we can figure it out together. But I know you do have a lot of background. and it's true. I just wanted to know also that today you will be sharing your professional personal opinions. You're not representing any of the organizations that you're linked to. So just so folks know that too, that this is Justin Beatty's professional wisdom that he's sharing with us today.

Justin Beattey: Yeah, so it's my professional experience and kind of that legal disclaimer, you know, the thoughts, opinions and beliefs of Justin Beatty may not necessarily represent the organizations he's employed or volunteers.

Justin Bell: That's fair. Yeah. Yeah. Okay, so we got that out of the way. Let's start this very practically. and very simply, what exactly is this thing called certification sometimes referred to also as credentialing? And why does it matter for anybody who's listening?

Justin Beattey: So the overall idea of certification or credentialing, you can hear it called either in states, you know. but I think one of the things I always like to highlight is professionally certification is higher than credentialing. Credentialing, generally

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Justin Beattey: speaking from an industry level is just saying we've. You meet specific criteria. Yeah. So think about like a credentialed press person that goes to the White House. We just say that, we just validate that they work for a press place. We don't know that they have specific training or have taken a competency based exam to do what their profession is. That's vetted by the employer. Employers have different standards, you know, and that's where, like using that at like a press conference, you hear different types, of course, questions, different demeanor and things like that, where you're kind and, and we've all seen that one thing where we're like, how'd that person get in there?

Justin Bell: Yeah.

Justin Beattey: Because they just worked for an organization that got approved to have

a press pass.

Justin Bell: Right.

Justin Beattey: And so it's a little bit different when someone's just asking a question or taking a photo or that kind of thing. But when someone's working alongside someone, we want to look more at that certification that's around base expectations for the service provided. And generally speaking, what the best practice is, some type of skills based competency exam that validates the person knows how to do those base expectations for the role. And so that's where even with peer certification and some other certifications in helping professions and in general we still don't even see exams. we see, hey, you attended this five day training, you did 30 hours of training, 40, 50, 60, whatever it is. But the reality is I think anybody listening to this knows I don't absorb everything I hear in a training. Like especially for a lot of people in peer work, they're coming from professions that, where you don't, you sit in maybe an hour long onboarding and you do some experiential learning where I go and shadow somebody and then they usually show me their way of doing, doing it. And it may or may not be the correct way. I think so many of us have been trained by that seasoned person that's like, understand what your video showed you?

Justin Beattey: Let me show you how we do it here.

Justin Bell: It's not real.

Justin Beattey: Yeah, yeah. And so certification allows that. Okay. In this state, nationally, by this third party authority, this is what we feel is the base you need for providing the service. And we've given you an exam to make sure you've retained the

base amount of information. And then the other key part of certification, that is a word, in my opinion, that I just mentioned, that third party accountability, that there is a way to keep people within their scope of practice because we know there's a ton of role drift in this. So keeping people within that scope of practice and also having a mechanism to report when necessary, unethical behaviors, a vetting, you know, seeing things like, you know, a registry where I can make sure someone's certified the way they say they are and those kind of things. And that's really where that certification truly lies. Because I think, I think we'll kind of hit on it later. But, and I know this is a taboo word to some people, but that's the professionalization, right. Of this industry because there is There is a difference between personal based mutual aid and professional peer support. And we're starting to really make that distinction. And they're two separate roles. I think far too often we confuse them as the same role. Both have very different distinct purposes that absolutely complement each other.

Justin Bell: Yeah, and I think as I was listening to you, I was going to say that was that I think you're very, you're hitting on these points strongly because you're very interested in sort of people who may call themselves peers but are not really getting properly, certified and those who are, who are, you know, value and that this is a process that happens. I tell this to other people. Like there was a point in America when people would call themselves doctors, but you didn't really know. They could maybe take things out of you, but you weren't quite clear if they could actually sew you back up, but they could call themselves doctors. You know, and there wasn't any sort of system of being able to figure out who was really a doctor and who could actually practice medicine. And those who just were calling themselves doctors because they did it as a hobby on the weekends when nobody else was around. So yeah, it seems like you're trying to kind of make that distinction and the importance of why we need this sort of stuff so that we don't have these. I mean the last, episode I just talked about was all about

ethics. And so we don't have some of these like unethical things that come up when people aren't properly trained. So if someone was listening today and they wanted to become a peer specialist, a quality professional

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Justin Bell: peer specialist, what are the first few steps that you would actually recommend that they take?

Justin Beattey: So typically people start by where do I get trained? I encourage people to start with what's required for a recognized certification in my state and work backwards because hooray, Google algorithms, they're based on SEO scores, clicking paid, you know, all this kind of stuff, that means at best you get the most popular, not what you're actually looking for.

Justin Bell: Right.

Justin Beattey: And so what I encourage people to do is look at job postings and things like that and say, okay, for the job I want, what are they requiring? What certifications do I see listed over and over again? And then look for that organization that does that certification. It could be one of your government agencies, it could be a sort of a private certification board, it could be both. But then look from there and find out what are the requirements.

Justin Bell: Yeah.

Justin Beattey: And then follow what those requirements are. Reach out to the

certification Agencies and say, hey, I'm interested in earning your certification. What do I need to do? How do I talk to someone you know, in today's immediate gratification world and how majority of people that are using technology or using it on their phones, we're impulse driven society, plain and simple. So a lot of times we're just sitting there, we don't like what we're watching on the streaming site, you know, or whatever. So like I'm gonna look into being a peer specialist. And so that's fine, that's great. But start by downloading indeed, start by looking at job postings and these kind of things in your area for what you want to do and say, okay, the commonality is they all require this one or two certification. Then go back to your search engine, search that specific certification name and confirm that someone, is the certification agency. Not that the training agency says it works because you go there and it should list these are the acceptable trainings to meet this. And then when you get to the point of talking to the training agency specifically ask them, I want to know that your training is accepted by this certification agency to earn this certification. Yeah. And, and I also always encourage getting that in writing.

Justin Beattey: So that way, worst case, you know, follow up with an email and this is the start of learning. The professionalization that a lot of people coming into the peer workforce aren't used to is like, because then should the agency that I'm getting certified from say they don't accept it, I can go back to the training agency and talk to them about a potential refund. I can't get a refund on the time, but I can say, hey, I have in writing. You say certification agency A accepts this I have in writing from certification agency A. They do not. So therefore I was misled because I can tell you as part of my role, I'm executive director of a statewide behavioral health certification agency. Policy and procedure. And for public protection, we only accept certain trainings for any of our certifications. We do them, prevention, treatment, recovery, leadership, everything. I can't tell you how often. And it pulls on my heartstrings, man, because I know someone

spent time and money that I have to contact someone and say I'm sorry we don't accept your training. But so and so said they did, you know, what can you do about it? I can't do anything. I am going to contact them and say that they remove where that's listed on their website. I do have a due diligence.

Justin Bell: Sure, yeah.

Justin Beattey: But I'm not. I can't refund your money.

Justin Bell: Can't fix it.

Justin Beattey: Yeah, I can't fix that at all. So I so kind of summon this up. Look at jobs. What certifications are actually being hired in your state, not what's available, what's actually being hired. And then from there what agency offers them. And work your way back to find out the specific requirements and how you obtain them.

Justin Bell: Yeah, I love that. That's all really great advice. It reminds me of a researcher friend who just did an analysis of peer job postings and what she talked about to me was like going through this process that you're describing, finding out more information, getting into the nitty gritty of what it actually takes kind of removes some of the romanticism around the role. Not that this role isn't, can't be incredibly satisfying, gratifying. I'm sure you would say all that. But like you said, I think there are people who kind of sit there and I see this, you know, in lots of different helping professions that, or research or whatever. Like I'm going to help people, you know, I'm going to change the world. And they get really excited about that. And you might. But you read these job descriptions and some of them can be pretty transparent that

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Justin Bell: your job is, is not just going to be like saving the world. That is not listed anywhere on the job description at all. Unfortunately there's no job like that. But you know, it, hopefully it lists things that are in the scope.

Justin Beattey: Right.

Justin Bell: Which you want to make sure of that too. But but it will give you I think a more realistic sort of thing of what am I going to go into? in terms of you know, sometimes time and you know, the expectations that they'll have. And they might talk about documentation, they might talk about like things that are sort of boring and that might make you go back to Netflix and be like, yeah, you know what, I'm not going to do this. And if, if it's that easy to dissuade you, then you probably shouldn't necessarily be getting into this. so I think you're right about like people should be doing their due diligence and kind of taking off the almost like lived experience veneer that gets thrown onto things where it's like you're going to become a peer, you're going to use your lived experience every day and you're going to save a million people and change your community. And yeah, that might happen but probably your day to day responsibilities are going to be much more mundane like the rest of us, I guess.

Justin Beattey: Well, and along those lines, like one. So I was at a Sam's appear convening on Monday and Tuesday and there were several of us talking and if these exist, we need to get them out there more. If people want to create them, hit me up. I'd love to be a part of it. Shameless promotion. But there should be videos and information out there of what does it actually mean to be a peer specialist? You know, because like you said, I love that. I love the term romanticizing it because that's what it

is is people have their personal mutual aid lived experience and think, well, I'm just going to be paid to be a recovery pathway specific mentor.

Justin Bell: Right.

Justin Beattey: And no, like this is like you said, like, no, you got to. If you don't document it, it didn't happen. Right. You got it. You got to get them to fill out paperwork. You have to. This isn't just somebody doing a fourth step inventory on a. He's a notebook paper. No, we're doing recover capital index scales, measuring it at specific intervals, having billing codes. Yeah. You know, all these things. And like you said, people are like, I didn't know I was going to have to write as part of this job. yeah, yeah, it's actually, it was

Justin Bell: in the job description. Yeah, yeah, I hear that all the time. And I hear people and supervisors tell me the same thing where their supervisees tell them that, you know, the peers that they're supervising. Like, yeah, they tell me like, oh, I didn't know I was have to document and well, yeah, it was actually in the job description. But. But again, people, when they have the blinders up of kind of like this is, this is, you know, the role that I imagine, like you said, either to be a sponsor or to just be like a savior to someone else. That's. It's probably a little unrealistic. so I appreciate that advice. One thing I wanted to ask though is there seems to be a lot of differences when it comes to this process across each state. And you know, I talked with a more clinical researcher once, I always quote this, where he found out that I studied the peer workforce and he said, said it's kind of like the wild west out there. And I'm sure, you know, I, I was kind of able to tell him like, you know, eh, it's not quite the wild west. Of course there's a lot of great developments. But why does it seem like every single state has a different process for Becoming a peer.

Justin Beattey: So I have not found the level lower than the Wild west, but that's, that's where we are. Like it was the Wild west for a long time. We have done some amazing work, some amazing steps forward in the last probably five to six years. But I would say that historically, especially compared to other professions, it is, that is definitely an accurate description in my opinion as well. And I think some of it is, is that there was. And again my professional opinion, but I think this is experiential based and conversation based is states were allowed to do what they wanted to for far too long. Yeah. Without any national guidance. And while we want specifics because each state's different and even within each state each community is different. Yeah. You know, and that kind of stuff, like what providing peer support in New York City looks like is different than what it means in another part of New York. Yeah. You know, that's out in the more rural area, you know, and that kind of thing. And so while I think it's. There's only been suggestions at the national level versus saying these are the base competencies that have to be followed, these are the base expectations. Now build what the details look like in your state. So there is two different national organizations that do national certification standards and

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Justin Beattey: stuff like that. There's NADAC and there's icnrc. They have affiliate members in each state. But also you have some organizations that kind of just were anointed through some type of funding, whether it was state or federal funding, to be certification agencies that really have no third party oversight. We've seen ssa, single state agencies, which are you know, a type of state, government agency become certification agencies. You know. So it's this, it's this infrastructure that was created and the overall infrastructure in states is similar usually where it's a private entity or your ssa, that single state agency, but they've done what they wanted to in their own state

that they felt met their needs. And I'm not saying it doesn't meet their needs or anything. There's great work going on everywhere.

Justin Bell: Of course. Yeah.

Justin Beattey: But now that we. And I think that has a lot to do with it and including funding, you know, as part of that. Like, you know, this is a profession that historically has been grant funded and maybe reimbursement supported, you know, at best. And so a lot of people were just like, I have these people with lived experience, local health department or some or private foundation. Will you give us some money? Cool. So we start doing it, you know, or the state got some money, was like, we need a certification, some random place, put in a proposal and did it, you know, and those kind of things. So I think that's kind of where it's got. And some of this stuff now is cauterized in law and statute. Yeah, it's. It's the ecosystem of the state to where we're almost figuring out how to adjust without breaking a system because there's so much great work being done. But, and again, I'm a. And I haven't said this yet, so I'll take back the. Again. Research, research, research. There is not enough research that exists on the workforce side. Right. And tying the workforce to outcomes. Yeah, there's research that shows the efficacy of peer outcomes, but we're not looking at it from the standpoint. What training and certification did this person have who delivered the services? Did we see increased outcomes for the participant when there was training and certification versus someone with an outs training and certification? So true. In my opinion, true work force outcomes data does not exist. It's just participant outcomes, which we can say peers are doing great work. Going back to the disclaimer at the beginning of using the term peer specialist, who are we talking about?

Justin Bell: Right. What.

Justin Beattey: We can't even decide as a profession what to call ourselves, let alone, you know, all this other stuff. And so we internally as a profession have to get off our high horses, swallow our pride a little bit, show a little bit more integrity and be willing to make compromises for the good of the profession. To say, I'm fine with my certification name being changed and having an industry standard term. Yeah, I'm fine with these being the base competencies, but knowing Indiana needs to go a little bit above here and here, you know, because we're really looking into stuff around reciprocity and things like that. You know, the ability to transfer over to another state. It was brought up recently at that, that SAMHSA event I was at and I hadn't considered this is someone related it back to nursing, you know, Florence Nightingale and I'm going to paraphrase this. Hopefully I don't butcher it. You know, Florence Nightingale and I think 1860 or something like that kind of led the, the nursing movement.

Justin Bell: Right.

Justin Beattey: And prior to that it was like you said, this person wants to help. They come in, they're the best washer of utensils in the area. So they're who you'll get the least infection from, you know, that kind of thing. We didn't know that they had skills or not. And it became a nursing profession through advocacy professionalization. We saw the same thing with count addiction counselors. They started out as people with lived experience and then we're like, they probably should know some stuff about the brain and some other things in the actual disease of addiction. But with the reciprocity around nurses. For example, there is a national exam and each state requires the specifics so that if you transfer to another state, you don't have to retake the exam. I just may have to take some additional trainings.

Justin Bell: Yeah.

Justin Beattey: From my professional opinion, if we could get to the point where we had a national exam that every state uses and then a base level of competencies every recognized certification uses, then we can start really being recognized by things like Department of Labor with an SOC code. That would be nice and all that kind of stuff. And hopefully eventually third

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Justin Beattey: party payer sources that aren't Medicaid or Medicare, you know, private insurance and things like that. Because like I said, we can't even decide in a state what it is because a lot of times in the states, certifications are competing with hours requirements, ethical expectations, which makes it a nightmare for the people using them. You mentioned supervisors earlier. It's like, okay, Justin Bell has this peer certification. I have to supervise you a certain way and you have certain ethical expectations. Justin Beatty has another recognized certification in our state, but has different expectations. That's a logistical nightmare. They both do amazing work, but I have to treat they same job description, same pay, doing the same work, but I have to supervise them differently and different expectations because those certifications can't get on the same page. Yeah, I, I normally am not a huge fan of government oversight.

Justin Bell: Of course. Yeah.

Justin Beattey: You know, but the reality is is we do need something to step in and help us figure out and, and I don't want to say mandate.

Justin Bell: Yeah.

Justin Beattey: Heavily influence some type of national exam being used. Which ones already exist.

Justin Bell: Yeah.

Justin Beattey: And national based standards, which again already exists.

Justin Bell: Yeah.

Justin Beattey: And so adopting those in states because I hope that states are using recognized competencies and we're not going to find someone that's being used, but we will.

Justin Bell: Right? Right. Yeah, it's moving in the right direction, I suppose. But yeah, I mean the nursing example is great. I didn't think about that one either. But you know, I have some, it creates opportunities too because I have some friends who are like traveling nurses and they're able to like, you know, they're highly skilled, they work, you know, maybe started got their training in these, you know, high, high level hospitals. You know, they become veteran nurses, and then they're able to go to places where there's workforce gaps or training gaps and. And go to another state, maybe a rural area where there's not enough nurses, or. Or go somewhere where they can kind of like, train or supervise some people for a certain amount of time, show them the ropes, and then go to another state and do the same thing. And, you know, but you can't do that. I mean, we have a problem at Chestnut, where I work, where we have a program, a peer program that spans across Missouri and Illinois because it's in the St. Louis area. And our peers on the Missouri team have to stop at the Missouri border because they ride the trains. And then we have a separate Illinois team that has to stop at the Missouri

border. And they can't. Like, if they accidentally go one more stop on the train line, it's like they're completely messed up and they can't bill anymore. So it's just stuff like that that's, like, incredibly confusing, unfortunately. And, yeah, I mean, I understand kind of the fears that come up around these things, but, yeah, there has to be a way to do something a lot better than what we have at the moment. well, kind of speaking about, different credentials, maybe the last part I wanted to ask you about that is there's also a lot of these. And I know you mentioned your strategy, which I thought was really great about actually going to job descriptions and looking, but maybe somebody has their main certification that allows them to be hired. Maybe they're hired already. But then there's a lot of these, like, you know, as you mentioned, like, national certifications that are popping up, and then also states that are adding, like, specialty endorsements. You can become, have a specialty with veterans or have a specialty with, adolescents or youth. Any opinions about these sort of things that are starting. I'm seeing them crop up a lot more lately, so I just wondered if you had any opinions or wisdom about those sort of things.

Justin Beattey: So I think there's pros and cons. So, like, our. Our certification agency does have endorsements. I'll be honest. We're discussing changing them to specializations because I really like. I like that wording better, you know, and that kind of thing, because it really is. It's getting specialized education, you know, when something to show you have specific competencies to a community modality or that kind of thing. the one concern I have with it that was just brought up over the past couple months that honestly just hadn't thought of is where does it end, though? Like, you know, and then. And what a good. What a good issue to have though, right? Like, I mean, be honest, like, you know, in the grand scheme of things, if it's. Where do we stop with specializations, then parade? Because I do think that there's. As, I mentioned, you know, there's base competencies to provide professional peer support, but there's

specific, unique cultural differences, specialization, referral, things of that nature you need, depending on the community you're working with, you know, like the specifics necessary to provide mental health peer support is different than substance use

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Justin Beattey: peer support, you know, and then you mentioned veterans. That's a whole nother thing around, in and of itself to understand just correct verbiage, what resources are available, understanding likes and dislikes of their engagement with the va. You know, I mean, there's. And, there's so many different things. And then, you know, forensic or, you know, justice involved people. You know, I mean, like, I think there's so much to be offered there. And I. And that's where I think with certification, it becomes important that people. And this might lead into where we were going to talk about CEUs is, that it's important that we create professional development plans for ourselves and alongside our employers to where we're not just quantifying the CEUs we get, we're qualifying them with stuff that interests us and will help us upskill ourselves to become a better professional and work alongside the community. So because I may get hired in at agency A, you know, I get my base certification, that kind of stuff, I get hired in an agency A, and they have a predominant, you know, community where they do outreach to people that are unhoused and things of that nature.

Justin Bell: Right.

Justin Beattey: Well, we talked about it a little bit in my base training, but I don't really have experience. Cool. Let me go as part of my CEU exploration and professional development, learn more about that community, specialized education, things in that nature. Because it's not just saying, ooh, I got x amount of CEUs to get recertified. I've

upskilled myself and grown who I am as a professional. And the caveat I always put in here with that is that so I come from a business background.

Justin Bell: Yep.

Justin Beattey: When we sit down and have discussions about potential pay increases, because that's why all of us work is to make money.

Justin Bell: Yeah.

Justin Beattey: Let's stop hiding. It is when we sit down and talk about a potential pay increase, tenure, or the amount of time I should be there should never be discussed. It should be based on how you have upskilled yourself and how you are of added value to the organization.

Justin Bell: I like that.

Justin Beattey: How do we do that? Training specific to the modalities and people we serve, we can assume and research suggests will increase positive outcomes for the communities I serve. so using the unhoused analogy, I come in, I agree to an hourly rate. I have base education throughout my time there. Prior to my review. I've got additional training. I've increased my competencies around our specific service delivery. I've increased outcomes. I'm able to see more people. I'm getting more referrals and all this stuff. I can then advocate going back through my professional development. They've seen this the whole time. I'm not the same professional you hired. I have a higher outcome for you. I have higher referral rates. I have this and that. Therefore, I am more valuable to you as an individual and a service provider. And I deserve. And that's

where I truly feel the word deserve. I deserve a, consideration for a higher pay because I'm not the same professional you hired. And then also I have those ceus. I'm maintaining my certification. That's necessary. I'm potentially getting specializations or endorsements if they're available. I'm moving maybe up to a higher level if I started at an entry level and there's a career ladder to grow within the peer profession. I'm interested in being a team lead or a supervisor. I'm valuable to the organization, but most importantly, I'm valuable to the people I serve because I have a bigger toolbox and bigger education to meet their individualized needs.

Justin Bell: Yeah. Yeah, no, that's great. It makes a lot of sense to me. I mean, I think that's the biggest risk I see sometimes when I've done, you know, research, studies, and we have to train peers or other helping professionals to do new things or things that they think they know but maybe aren't doing particularly well. But I kind of hear that, like, and it's like a plateauing where I hear some of the more veterans saying sort of something to the effect of, like, well, I've been doing this for like 10 years, so, like, I already know you know how to do this. Like, motivational interviewing is like a common one we get because we use it a lot in studies. And. And you get that kind of like, well, I've been doing motivational interviewing for a long time. So, like, I. I don't really need to be at this training. I already know how to do it. Like you can like skip this part or whatever. And it is a mentality that, that I don't think serves people well. And I, I, like what you said though, about like a personal professional development plan. That seems like something that would be a great, great, I think supervisor strategy too, to have, you know, to, to lay that out from the beginning of that person being hired. Like, what are your goals? What do you want to get better at? Or like you said, what do you feel is going to serve you well for this particular population that you're about to work with? And how can we sort of help you get there to attend those sort of trainings, find those sort of trainings?

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Justin Bell: yeah, I don't, I don't hear that that strategy discussed as much like a personal professional development plan, but it sounds like a great idea to me for sure.

Justin Beattey: And I think where you mentioned, like, that's where having good supportive leadership really comes into play.

Justin Bell: Yeah.

Justin Beattey: Like we, we need third party feedback.

Justin Bell: Right.

Justin Beattey: Because, because what you just said about like tenured people, you know, like, I know all this, I hear it regularly and I think it's one of the most terrifying things I ever hear in any profession.

Justin Bell: Yeah.

Justin Beattey: Because like, humans change by the minute. Literally. We are changing more literally by the second now than we ever have in mankind. And so you're telling me there's no new skills you can learn to work with society of today? They were teaching you that stuff when you attended that training eight years ago, you know, and those kind of things. And usually when I bring it up with people, I think there's a complacency with that because a lot of times, you know, we get stuck in the. Well, this isn't really getting me anything. Like, you know, like I know what I'm doing and this and

that. Yeah. But I don't have any more promotions to do. I'm at the highest certification I can. I won't ever become a supervisor because our organization requires a clinician to do it because of billing or grant requirements. And I think that's where that supportive leadership to develop our skills, but also having that career ladder and internal development can motivate people to continue to move forward in their careers rather than feeling stagnant. And that, I think, is on leadership and the organizational onus.

Justin Bell: Yeah, I think incentivizing it. Yeah. Yeah. Because you're right. I mean, some people, the only way they're going to do this is for more pay, but if that helps the workforce be more quality, then that's, that's cool. Too. But yeah, I was going to say like most of the time or like the best feedback I get from trainings that I've done is yeah, like a lot of times people come into these trainings with that mentality and then they leave and if they're honest about it, they tell me they're like yeah, you know what, to be honest, like I thought I knew everything about MI or whatever else, supervision, other things that we train on and then they were like yeah, but actually when I really paid attention in the training I realized I didn't know everything and there's actually a bunch of stuff I realized that now I need to go do more trainings on because I didn't realize like the depth of this stuff. And So yeah, just try it I guess is the recommendation, in that vein, kind of thinking about continuing education. I hear a couple complaints from folks that I work with from time to time. One is that they find it really hard to find peer specific continuing education units and they oftentimes have to, you know, take a social work social worker directed training or a therapist directed training or whatever because it like kind of fits or like at least the outcome or whatever that they're looking for is there even though it's not meant for peers. And also, you know, you hear sometimes complaints about like I tried to take this training, you know, it was on a state's resource list or something like that and it sucked. It was a person talking in front of slides for two hours and they never addressed the audience and I hated it. But at least I got my cus.

So I guess how do people in your recommendation find like both peer specific CUS and kind of quality CUS as well.

Justin Beattey: So the cynicism in me wants to say good luck but that's not.

Justin Bell: Well I was going to say can you find both or is it a one or the other sort of situation?

Justin Beattey: They exist. Yeah, like they absolutely exist. There is some amazing stuff out there. What's hard is I think going back to that state specific and certification specific is that stuff is not universally accepted. So I may hear about an amazing trainer and training from someone on a social media site that did it in Iowa. They just share, man, I attended this training, man. Dr. Justin Bell did so well to do it provide CEUs, but my place in Kansas won't accept CEUs from that place.

Justin Bell: Right.

Justin Beattey: You know and I ah, so I think the first key piece of it is again we as an industry need to figure out a way for A more universally accepted CEU thing that like if a recognized certification agency accepts it, another one will, you know, like those kind of things. Yes, there's some national CEU agencies that you can get approved through. But that's money. Yeah, like that's, that's not cheap to do those kind of things. And so I think it's part of it is I always suggest

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Justin Beattey: two things. One, if you're unsure if a training is going to be accepted,

always contact your certification agency. Like say hey we have people contact us all the time. Before I take this, do you know anything about it? This kind of stuff. And we'll point out things like, like typically in a one hour webinar it's gonna be didactic based which means them sitting in front of slides talking to you. There maybe will be question and answer at the end and kind of talking to people about looking at time frames and what is realistic. A short hour or two probably gonna get just talked to the whole time.

Justin Bell: Yeah, right.

Justin Beattey: And that kind of thing. A day training. Hopefully there's some skills development in it. And that's one things I always encourage if nothing else else reach out to the training agency and say hey, could you explain to me this training a little bit more. I'm looking for something that's interactive where there's small group work where we are engaged in these kind of things. Can you please describe to me what type of training this is? And from my experience good training agencies will respond back that no, this is mainly content heavy. They'll use big industry terms. They don't want to say it's boring. So they'll say no, this is a lot of, of theoretical practice presentation where we'll allow you use the chat to ask questions or to submit a question and we will do those at the end of each module. And you can judge and be like dude, that sounds terrible or that's exactly what I'm looking for.

Justin Bell: M maybe that's all you can fit in your schedule. The lunch break sort of sit in the training and get your cus and then figure it out. Yeah.

Justin Beattey: And so I think that's one of the biggest piece and we as an industry could do so much better with continuing education. I think right now we as an industry are so focused on building a new workforce instead of strengthening the existing

available workforce. I'm not going to say the employed workforce, I'm heavily emphasizing the available. I don't think we've done enough from an employability and professional development and career navigation support for this industry. As we should. We're training and certifying people and I come from a training and certification organization. Then we all could do so much better with the what's next? Preparing people for now that you're done. Here's available continuing education. Like our organization, for example, we have monthly peer webinars for upskilling to dive deeper and that kind of stuff. Stuff. But one of the things we run into, our CEUs are recognized by Indiana state statute. We've heard other states won't accept them. Yeah, you know, for their thing. And that goes back to that thing because we, we do skills building and that kind of stuff. But we're limited in the amount of people we can have in there first because if we want it to be interactive, we cap it at 25, 30 people for a couple hour webinar so people can actually talk, be in small groups and stuff. Which then limits availability. So yes, we have them available but us keeping it experiential and conversation based limits availability on the other side of it because what's the point of having an interaction if there's 100 people there and only 5? And we know people talk. I talk. I love to talk. And so like there's people that are going to dictate the conversation. And so overall, to kind of summarize, I would say talking to your certification agency, who do they suggest? And then also talk to the workforce. What have you went to? What did you enjoy? Start following organizations. Use social media. Get on every mailing list you possibly can. And then what I would encourage to do is if you see a presenter, you like go follow them on something like LinkedIn, message them, say, hey, I love your content. When else are you doing some trainings? Because a lot of trainers don't always train for the same organization. Yeah, they're contractors and train for different people. And then ask them, say, love your style, man. Who do you kick it with that has a similar style of yours? Oh, go follow this person, that person. And we know social media gives us a ton of if you're connected to this person, go here. That's how

I've met so many amazing people is actually through professional networking sites.

Yeah, I think actually Dr. Bell, that's how you and I originally got connected.

Justin Bell: I think originally, even though you had known Dennis, I think we, we started talking through LinkedIn and I saw and

Justin Beattey: we, we've built an amazing relationship. We work on projects together all the time and stuff. And it started through that professional networking and that kind of thing. So again, not common for People coming into peer industry to use things that are not personal. Social media that like, I don't know.

Justin Bell: I mean,

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Justin Bell: yeah, I mean, people don't talk about it. And I think unfortunately it's like you come from a business background, I come from academic background. So those are two fields where like the LinkedIn stuff is all there and it's kind of like you're, you're missing out if you don't do it, I think. And this is another unfortunate side effect of sort of the heavy authenticity component. And also that a lot of times people coming into the peer workforce are fresh and raw and coming off of, you know, their own, challenges. And yeah, it's just not emphasized. And I've seen peers like, totally change their career trajectory because of LinkedIn. Like, honestly, I have seen people who like, they were just peers. I started seeing them comment on my LinkedIn post, liking things, reblogging things. And then like, I'm sitting in like a NIDA meeting where it's all these like federal professionals and they bring out some panel and that peer who like I saw commenting on LinkedIn like a year ago is now sitting on a night of panel and they're

like, yeah, I started going to these meetings that I saw on LinkedIn that had open Zoom invites and I just started talking and people actually, ah, respected my opinions and they were inviting me to community boards and, and it's crazy. It's like, yeah, like, you can totally change your career with LinkedIn. And like, I hated the idea of LinkedIn when I first started. Like, I was just like, I don't like, I know what LinkedIn I'm gonna become like this hustler influencer. Like, this is how I made a \$30,000 sale last week. And it's like, no, like, people are using LinkedIn for decent purposes. As much as you might not believe it if you're listening to this, but, but people do. And there's a whole like lived experience community that lives on LinkedIn and I'm sure also on X and some of the other pseudo professional places. I mean even Facebook has like professional communities. I now get in my Facebook timeline because I've liked one too many peer things like I some professional groups that pop up talking about trainings and credentials and stuff like that. So, so yeah, I do recommend that people do that. And I, I wanted to say too, something I, I think is interesting that's happened as well, is like since COVID I think there's been such a big scale shift of like virtual trainings. And I, I, I really wish that like, I think in a perfect world the workforce would be going to those inspirational day long or multiple day long trainings once a quarter. I'm not saying you have to do it all the time, but we do this in some of our interventions where we do booster trainings once a quarter and they might be getting the intervention or whatever, once a month, a week, whatever. But then these booster trainings are the ones where we really like, you know, multiple hour interactive or day long in person. Like, and those like people leave and they're like, I'm ready, I'm fired. It's like going to a good conference. Like I'm fired up. I'm gonna totally change my professional development plan. I'm gonna do this and do that. And it just naturally fades. I feel like just about like nine every 90 days, it just starts to fade away. So I wish that there was that structure. I recommend it to anybody who's listening.

Justin Beattey: And and I would agree wholeheartedly with you there. Like majority of our trainings are online for ease of access.

Justin Bell: Right.

Justin Beattey: And I really wish we could find a way to break that culture of and, and find it. And I don't. Let me pull back on break and find a more equitable mix. Sure.

Justin Bell: yeah.

Justin Beattey: Virtual versus in person. Like I like your idea of let's do these trainings virtual that build up to say once a quarter or whatever of our in person. Where we're going to take that knowledge, do knowledge checks, expand on it. You get to meet some people, network, you know, because like we, we did only in person trainings prior to Covid.

Justin Bell: Yeah. And most people did, I think.

Justin Beattey: And, and I remember for our five day peer specialist training, people would leave for lunch on like day one and that kind of stuff. By day three if people didn't bring their lunch, they had it delivered and everybody sat around for the hour break and chit chatted and got to know each other. Even those of us who didn't smoke went out with the smokers to talk. Just hanging out, you know, you know, and that kind of stuff like sitting around chit chatting. And I get it because we're sitting in front of a screen. But like on the breaks now, everybody turns off their camera and goes and does something else. So you lose that connection and that networking that was able to be had at those in person. Which is a key part that is missing in this field is professional

colleague, peer to peer support, having someone else who does the same job. You get Process. Thanks.

Justin Bell: Yeah. And just getting to know them on a personal level and, and yeah, I just feel like the in person training just keep people fired up. You know, I've been reading Talk, told other guests this, but I just finished reading Bill White's autobiography, which he was a trainer. And

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Justin Bell: he, he doesn't describe this about himself, but when I told someone else that they were like, yeah, I, I went to some of Bill White's trainings in like the 80s and 90s and they were like, you know, you ever seen a video of like those snake preachers in the, you know, like in the tents down in the south? They're like, that was Bill White. But he was talking about recovery and service and counseling and stuff like that. And like, like, yeah, I've seen those trainings. People leave like just fired up and it's like as much as I can yell over zoom Mic, it just doesn't have the same effect, as that. So, well, with that being said, kind of one of the last questions I want to ask you, which I'm sort of going to combine two questions that I had prompted to you when we were planning this. What changes would you like to see to training, and certification in the next like five to ten years? And how do we do those changes without losing sort of the soul of peer support, the magic, whatever. You want to say that the ability to really help people on an authentic level.

Justin Beattey: I'd say the first I kind of, alluded to and specifically talked about a little bit earlier was there needs to be a national base, consistency. So that, Because I mean also too people move like we are a migrant society. And so if I move from Minnesota

down to Florida, I shouldn't have a completely different kind of professional peer support. Yeah, I may have a different person, but there should not be any. Well, why are you doing this? Why aren't you doing this? You don't know this. You do know this, you know, and there's an assumption that's being done now, but there's no teeth to ensure that it's being done, so to speak. And so I would say that's the biggest thing I would like to see. And with that I think it needs to be the existing certification bodies coming together and really being able to come to an agreement and going back to putting my business hat on. One is if in a decision making thing and a collaboration, if everybody leaves a little disappointed, you have a good agreement. Like, I like if everybody gets what they want. No, that's not good. Or you want everybody to leave a little disappointed. So where I'm going with that is that those of us who are leaders in that space and decision makers have to be willing to compromise. And that's not something I've seen too much. We're having too many people hold true to their space instead of being able to compromise and say, and that's not compromising services, professions or any of that kind of stuff. That's why I talk about the base and then what your state wants to do as the, as, as hire, that's fine. But we're all requiring A, B and C. So that's my biggest like desire, dream. And I think those conversations are starting to happen. Happen.

Justin Bell: Yes. I mean I'm, I'm encouraged. You've been talking about the SAMHSA panel. SAMHSA seems to be hosted multiple panels that are peer related in the past couple months even. And I've been seeing people post about on LinkedIn how great they are. And I've been seeing, it's just been funny to see people in my network who are from like very disparate sides of the field, even like mental health and substance use and you know, kind of connecting the dots that like they were all at the same event and maybe got to know each other and stuff. So I'm encouraged that, yeah they are. Somebody's creating these spaces, which is what I've always said. Like the only reason

that we had, for example in the 2000s the new recovery advocacy movement, which was like the start in the substance use field of this professional peer support role and RCOs and other things, was just there was a space. There was a space for people to talk and to just hash things out. And as I've told people too, like it wasn't a space where anybody was worried like on a comment section about getting screenshotted, taken out of context. You know, it was just like people, like nobody was recorded really. It was just like you could say, you know, and, and kind of be sure that like people were, you know, respecting you and, and if you, you know, messed up or gotten a little argument or whatever, that that was hashed out there. And yeah, so I agree. People just needing to talk more and probably also have some of these conversations in person as well, which it seems like.

Justin Beattey: Yeah, and I think, I think that's a key thing is like a lot of these. And I, and I love, like you said, that SAMHSA and some of these other places are doing in person convening. Yes. It costs Money. But the net, like the conversations that were had in between the actual events that Sam was saying were amazing.

Justin Bell: Yeah.

Justin Beattey: Met so many people I'd only connected with on, LinkedIn or talked to a year ago, you know, and there were so many conversations and action items. I think that's the

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Justin Beattey: other big thing is, yeah, we need to stop meeting for the sake of meeting. And at the end of every meeting there needs to be direct action items and

accountability. Yeah. And I think that's where this profession has been slowed is because again, that lack of, and I'm just going to use the word very directly, professionalization is being a professional is accountability and action items and deliverables.

Justin Bell: Some agenda. Yep.

Justin Beattey: Yeah. And so, so when we start moving from just feel good testimonial, there's a spot for that.

Justin Bell: Sure.

Justin Beattey: Business meetings are not it. If we're convening people for a business meeting, let's get to brass tacks. Let's talk the business, let's maximize our time, let's assign outcomes, deliverables, timetables and everything and then move on to it and hold people accountable to doing that. I think that's where, in my opinion, historically we've been a little loosey with some of the stuff of saying, well, we'll, we'll get back to you. And they said, well, when will you get back to me? Yeah, you know, like you'll have an answer, but when can I expect the next steps? You know, these kind of things, Even if you don't know, Give me an estimated thing, roughly 90 days, nine years. Where are we at with this?

Justin Bell: Yeah, because that's the worst feeling is that you leave those in person meetings so fired up, so ready to go. And then, yeah, sometimes, and this even happens at conferences, I come back and I kind of like sit in my room and I'm like fired up and stuff. And then I'm like, oh, wait, like what? Other than sending some emails, what can I do now? There's nothing that can be done. Nobody decided on anything. We

just were kind of like, oh, I would love to collaborate. I would love to. Yeah, I'll shoot you an email. Okay. Yeah, When I get around to it, I'll shoot you an email too. And then it doesn't go anywhere. So you're right. And I think we can take them as well.

Justin Beattey: Right.

Justin Bell: No, I, I'm saying that as a person who does that. But if you look at historically, again, going back to NRAAM, going back to the mental health movements in the 70s, AIDS movements, even like places where stuff happened. Like they had agendas, they had like the 10 point, you know, plan to get to this thing. and they showed this to people, especially two federal entities, and they were like, if you don't, don't do this or you don't help us do this, we're going to make some noise and we're going to be really annoying for a long time in all the different ways that they were. but strategically, and then things got done. So. yeah, I agree. And, and hopefully these meetings, I know NIDA is having their first working meeting, they're calling it, which is supposed to have the same thing. Like, it's not just a meeting, it's not just a conference. It's a working meeting for recovery science, which is supposed to set a real agenda federally for recovery science, which includes, of course scaling the peer workforce. So hopefully we'll see more of that research.

Justin Beattey: and I'd say that's my one other desire that I think is happening, but I want to see more and more of is direct partnership with research. Yeah, like, we're seeing it expand, but not at the rate some other research is. And I, you know, in other industries and that kind of stuff. And I just, I think there's amazing things being done and I think a lot, lot of it is misunderstanding of the purpose of research by the field itself. Yeah, Like, I think it's a lot of assumptions, you know, for, for a community and group that talks about how bad stigma is there, this, this profession stigmatizes

anybody. That's not them, like, oh, they're just this, that. And like, I have yet to meet a researcher who's not amazing. I'm sure there's just one out there somewhere. But like, they're always like, I want to show why you're awesome. Right. Like, let me work alongside you and show why you're awesome and why you guys should get a bunch of money. And then I want to come back and do it all again to figure out if we were right, wrong, and what's great and what should be adjusted. So let's just keep working together and it's like, that's what we need.

Justin Bell: Yeah, yeah, I agree, I agree. And I think from the science side, I mean, just to give my perspective, I think there's a misunderstanding too of like a lot of heavy emphasis. And I, I sometimes I tell this to people and I can see the cogs turning in their brain where I tell them. I'm like, yes, it is important to get the effectiveness research out there. It's important to show that peers can deliver services, fidelity, quality, make change, all these sort of things. But peers are not an intervention. Which then I always get sort of the confused glazed look. And I'm like, you wouldn't call a social worker an intervention, right? You wouldn't just say, say, social workers are effective full stop. You would say social workers are effective at X, Y and Z. But as we know, in order to get there, you need to have good pay, you need them to have job satisfaction, professional development, all these things. And a lot of times

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Justin Bell: it's just people sort of like, I've literally read research papers that said, like, peers are an EBI evidence based intervention. And it's like that's, that's a person you're talking about, that's a workforce you're talking about. That's not some like, protocol in a manual. That, that's a person. So I think that's from the research side, the misunderstanding or the, the the overemphasis on kind of like we need to find out if

they're effective. And it's like one, of course we're really learning they are of, you know, in, in the things that they do. But also it's like they are a workforce and we're missing that in a lot of the research right now. So more collaboration makes sense for sure. Well, the last question I want to ask in the spirit of this podcast, the Peer Support Professionals Guide. If you had to give one piece of advice to someone listening today who wants to become a peer specialist, what would you let them know? Or what advice would you give them before they begin their journey?

Justin Beattey: Do your homework.

Justin Bell: Do your homework.

Justin Beattey: Learn what the profession actually is within your state, what the services look like on a daily basis, and what is needed to be employed, not just to get trained. What is needed to become employed. Find some people that do the work and talk to them. And so that would be the thing is just overall, do your homework, and look into what this actually is prior to investing your time and energy into it.

Justin Bell: Yeah, I love that. Absolutely. Thank you so much for being a guest today. Thank you for making an addition to the guide and, appreciate your time.

Justin Beattey: Awesome. Thank you.

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